

CULTURED WORK

Two Americans Open Pearly Gates

By Anesthetizing Lowly Oyster



PREPARING to descend for the inspection of one of Mikimoto's pearl-oyster crops, two girl divers help each other adjust diving masks.



AMA (DIVER) feels her way over the dark ocean floor as she replaces impregnated oysters in containers where they will remain 3 to 5 years.

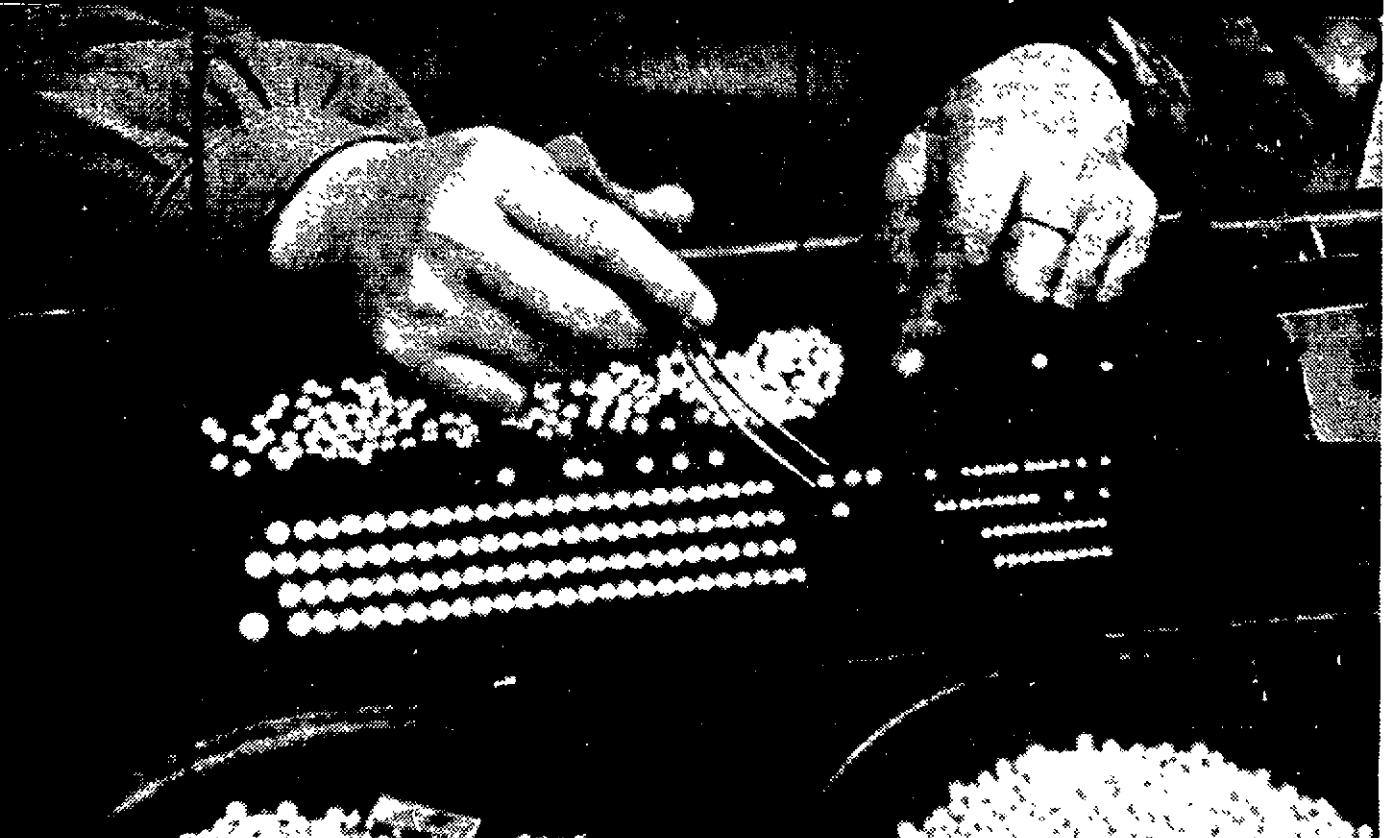
"Lot 88"—When Gen. Douglas MacArthur invaded the Japanese mainland, his troops found a fabulous cache of choicest pearls ever seen (pictured above). He ordered the pearls sold. The lot went to Joseph Goldstone of the Imperial Pearl Syndicate.



A girl worker prepares to insert a mother-of-pearl bead into oyster that has been in an anesthetic solution.



A 3-year-old pearl is removed from an oyster. Several times a year oysters are checked against infection.



Carefully matched pearls are made into strings by girls, who average about 20 finished necklaces per day.

THE expression "a gem of an idea" can in all truth be traced to Kokichi Mikimoto, 94-year-old founder of Japan's fabulous cultured pearl industry who, in 1894, began irritating oysters for a living and is now one of Nippon's wealthiest men.

Although the Chinese discovered the secret in the 13th century, Mr. Mikimoto, then a poor macaroni peddler, was the first to realize the great wealth that lay on the ocean's floor if one went about it in a scientific manner.

Mikimoto's earliest method of creating cultured pearls was to insert a tiny mother-of-pearl bead into a healthy oyster. The oyster, thus irritated, would build around the bead layer upon layer of nacre, the lustrous, opalescent substance of which pearls are made. Although the system worked, the irritant killed almost 80 per cent of the oysters. Whereupon two Americans, Joseph and David Goldstone, increased the oyster's yield tenfold by their development of an anesthetic solution whereby the oysters were "put to sleep," then injected with the irritant. The mortality rate dropped to less than 5 per cent.

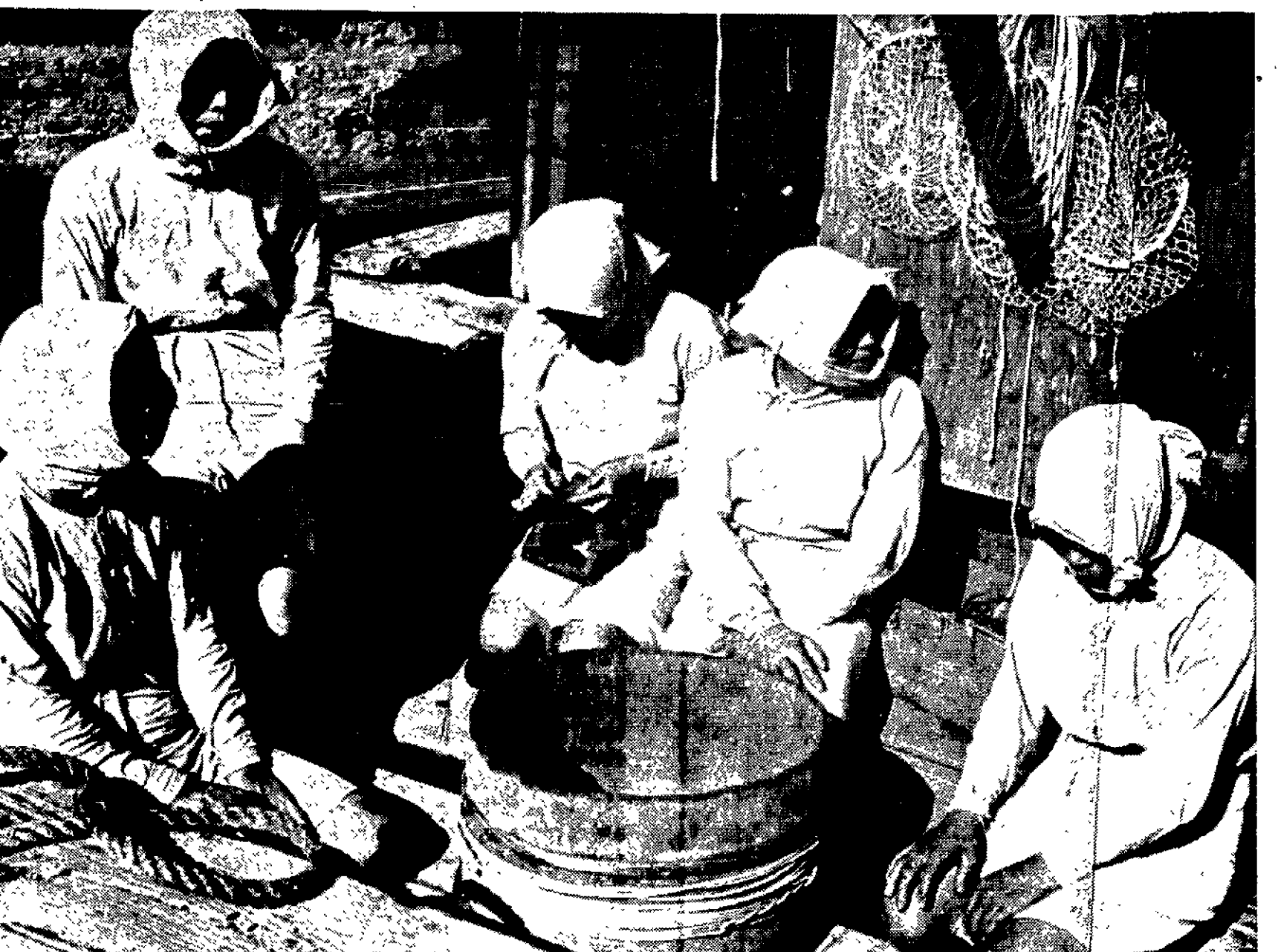


Smiling ruler of Japan's pearl industry, 94-year-old Kokichi Mikimoto with two of his divers. Tycoon calls amas "my children."



KNEELING on reed mats inside the diving boat, two girl divers enjoy lunch of roasted clams cooked by a member of their fraternity.

long since "retired." Dry clothes hang on lines above the stove. White diving attire is used to scare away sharks infesting water.



RESTING BETWEEN DIVES, the women sit in the sun and chat. The amas usually range in age from 17 to 21 and are mostly used instead of men because of their great lung power. When girls retire from diving they usually are relegated to oyster cleaning ashore.

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